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BEFORE ADAM



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We were afraid only of the dark. We had no germs of religion, no concep-
tions of an unseen world. We knew only the real world, and the things we feared were the real things, the concrete dangers, the flesh and blood animals that preyed. It was they that made us afraid of the dark, for darkness was the time of the hunt-
ing animals. It was then that they came out of their lairs and pounced upon one from the dark wherein they lurked invisibly.

Possibly it was out of this fear of the real dangers of the dark that the fear of the unreal dangers was later to develop and culminate in a whole and mighty unseen world. As imagi-
nation grew it is likely that the fear of death increased until the folk that were to come projected this fear into the dark and peopled it with spirits. I think the Fire People had already begun to be afraid of the dark in this fashion, but the reasons we folk had for breaking up our hee-hee councils and fleeing to our holes were old Sab-
ber Tooth, the lions and the jackals, the wild dogs and the wolves, and all the hungry, meat eating breeds. Lop Ear and I married. It was the second winter after our adventure journey, and it was most unexpected. He gave me no warning. The first I knew was one twilight when I climbed the cliff to our cave. I squeezed into the entrance and there I stopped. There was no room for me. Lop Ear and his mate were in possession, and she was gone other than my sister, the daughter of my stepfather, the Chatterer.

I tried to force my way in. There was space only for two, and that space was already occupied. Also, they had me at a disadvantage, and, what with the scratching and hair pulling I received, I was glad to re-
treat. I slept that night, and for many nights, in the connecting passage of the double cave. From my experience it seemed reasonably safe. As the two folk had dodged old Sabber Tooth, and



Red Eye Roared With Rage. as I had dodged Red Eye, so it seemed to me that I could dodge the hunt-
ing animals by going back and forth between the two caves.

I had forgotten the wild dogs. They were small enough to go through any passage that I could squeeze through. One night they nosed me out. Had they entered both caves at the same time they would have got me. As it was, followed by some of them through the passage, I dashed out the mouth of the other cave. Outside were the rest of the wild dogs. They sprang for me as I sprang for the cliff wall and began to climb. One of them, a lean and hungry brute, caught me in mid-leap. His teeth sank into my thigh muscles and he nearly dragged me back. He held on, but I made no effort to dislodge him, devoting my whole effort to climbing out of reach of the rest of the brutes.

Not until I was safe from them did I turn my attention to that live agony on my thigh. And then, a dozen feet above the snapping pack that leaped and scrambled against the wall and fell back, I got the dog by the throat and slowly throttled him. I was a long time doing it. He clawed and ripped my hair and hide with his hind paws, and ever he jerked and lunged with his weight to drag me from the wall.

At last his teeth opened and released my torn flesh. I carried his body up the cliff with me and perched out the night in the entrance of my old cave, wherein were Lop Ear and my sister. But first I had to endure a storm of abuse from the aroused horde for being the cause of the distur-
bance. I had my revenge. From time to time, as the noise of the pack below eased down, I dropped a rock and started it up again. Whereupon from all around the abutments of the exasperated folk began a crash. In the morning I shared the dog with Lop Ear and his wife, and for several days the three of us were neither vegetarians nor carnivores.

Lop Ear's mate was not a happy one, and the consolation about it was, I always ran when I saw the old

man tottering along on his two canes. Old Marrow Bone even had a bit of sparse and straggly white beard that seemed identical with the whiskers of the old man.

As I have said, Marrow Bone was the only old member of the horde. He was an exception. The folk never lived to old age. Middle age was fairly rare. Death by violence was the com-
mon way of death. They died as my father had died, as Broken Tooth had died, as my sister and the Hairless One had just died—abruptly and bru-
tally, in the full possession of their faculties, in the full swing and rush of life. Natural death? To die violently was the natural way of dying in those days.

No one died of old age among the folk. I never knew of a case. Even

that it did not last very long. Neither he nor I was happy during that period. I was lonely. I suffered the inconvenience of being cast out of my safe little cave, and somehow I did not make it up with any other of the young males. I suppose my long con-
tinued chumming with Lop Ear had become a habit.

I might have married, it is true, and most likely I should have married had it not been for the dearth of females in the horde. This dearth, it is fair to assume, was caused by the exorbitance of Red Eye, and it illustrates the menace he was to the existence of the horde. Then there was the Swift One, whom I had not forgotten.

As any rate, during the period of Lop Ear's marriage I knocked about from pillar to post, in danger every night that I slept and never comfort-
able. One of the folk died, and his widow was taken into the cave of an-
other one of the folk. I took posses-
sion of the abandoned cave, but it was wide mouthed, and after Red Eye nearly trapped me in it one day I returned to sleeping in the passage of the double cave. During the summer, how-
ever, I used to stay away from the caves for weeks, sleeping in a tree shelter I made near the mouth of the slough.

I have said that Lop Ear was not happy. My sister was the daughter of the Chatterer, and she made Lop Ear's life miserable for him. In no other cave was there so much squabbling and bickering. If Red Eye was a Blue-beard Lop Ear was henpecked, and I imagine that Red Eye was too shrewd ever to covet Lop Ear's wife.

Fortunately for Lop Ear, she died. An unusual thing happened that sum-
mer. Late, almost at the end of it, a second crop of the stringy rooted car-
rots sprang up. These unexpected sec-
ond crop roots were young and juicy and tender, and for some time the carrot patch was the favorite feeding place of the horde. One morning early several score of us were there mak-
ing our breakfast. On one side of me was the Hairless One. Beyond him were his father and son, old Marrow Bone and Long Lip. On the other side of me were my sister and Lop Ear, she being next to me.

There was no warning. On the sud-
den, both the Hairless One and my sister sprang and screamed. At the same instant I heard the thud of the arrows that transfixed them. The next instant they were down on the ground, floundering and gasping, and the rest of us were stampeding for the trees. An arrow drove past me and entered its feathered shaft vibrating and oscillating from the impact of its arrested flight. I remember clearly how I swerved as I ran to go past it and that I gave it a needlessly wide berth. I must have shied at it as a horse shies at an object it fears.

Lop Ear took a smashing fall as he ran beside me. An arrow had driven through the calf of his leg and tripped him. He tried to run, but was tripped and thrown by it a second time. He sat up, crouching, trembling with fear and called to me pleadingly. I dashed back. He showed me the arrow. I caught hold of it to pull it out, but the consequent hurt made him seize my hand and stop me. A flying arrow passed between us. Another struck a rock, splintered and fell to the ground. This was too much. I pulled suddenly with all my might. Lop Ear screamed as the arrow came out and struck at me angrily. But the next moment we were in full flight again.

I looked back. Old Marrow Bone, deserted and far behind, was tottering silently along in his handicapped race with death. Sometimes he almost fell, and once he did fall; but no more arrows were coming. He scrambled weakly to his feet. Age burdened him heavily, but he did not want to die. The three fire men, who were now run-
ning forward from their forest am-
bush, could easily have got him, but they did not try. Perhaps he was too old and tough. But they did want the Hairless One and my sister, for as I looked back from the trees I could see the fire men beating in their heads with rocks. One of the fire men was the wizened old hunter who limped.

CHAPTER XII.

We went on through the trees to-
ward the caves, an excited and disor-
derly mob, that drove before it to their holes all the small life of the forest and that set the bluejays scream-
ing impudently. Now that there was no immediate danger, Lop Ear waited for his grandfather, Marrow Bone, and with the gap of a generation be-
tween them the old fellow and the youth brought up our rear.

And so it was that Lop Ear became a bachelor once more. That night I slept with him in the old cave, and our old life of chumming began again. The loss of his mate seemed to cause him no grief. At least he showed no signs of it nor of need for her. It was the wound in his leg that seemed to bother him, and it was all of a week before he got back again to his old spryness.

Marrow Bone was the only old mem-
ber in the horde. Sometimes on look-
ing back upon him, when the vision of him is most clear, I note a striking re-
semblance between him and the father of my father's grandfather. The garden-
er's father was very old, very wrinkled and withered, and for all the world when he peered the way his tiny heavy eyes and bearded and acted like old Marrow Bone. This resem-
blance came to me, a child, used to frighten-
ing me, I always ran when I saw the old



He Jerked and Lunged With His Weight to Drag Me From the Wall.

Marrow Bone did not die that way, and he was the only one in my genera-
tion who had the chance. A bad crip-
pling, any serious accidental or tempo-
rary impairment of the faculties, meant swift death. As a rule these deaths were not witnessed. Members of the horde simply dropped out of sight. They left the caves in the morning, and they never came back. They disappeared into the ravenous maws of the hunting creatures.

This crowd of the Fire People on the carrot patch was the beginning of the end, though we did not know it. The hunters of the Fire People began to appear more frequently as the time went by. They came in twos and threes, creeping silently through the forest, with their flying arrows able to annihilate distance and bring down prey from the top of the loftiest tree without themselves climbing into it. The bow and arrow was like an enormous extension of their leaping and striking muscles, so that, virtually, they could leap and kill at a hundred feet and more. This made them far more terrible than Sabber Tooth him-
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